

A
DISCOURSE

ON THE
NATURE AND USE
OF
CONFIRMATION.

L O N D O N :

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Church-Yard.



THE following Discourse was drawn up, for the service of those in the Author's parish who were going to be presented to the Bishop for Confirmation; and was preached on the Sunday immediately preceding that ceremony. But the whole design of it, being to explain the nature and inculcate the use of that Office in our church, it has been thought that its end would be more fully answered, by throwing off some copies, which may be given to the Candidates on future occasions, that they may have it to read and consider at their leisure. That it may induce them to reflect upon the Vows they make, and to keep them carefully ever afterwards, is the sincere desire and fervent prayer of

The AUTHOR.

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DISCOURSE, &c.

1 COR. xiv. 26. *Let all things be done
to edifying.*

MY design now is, to perform the promise made to those who have offered themselves for Confirmation, of giving them some general account of the nature of that Office: for, though it has been explained to each of them in as familiar a manner as we were able, when they were separately with us in private (and there was great reason to hope that they understood what was then said to them, and were desirous of reaping all the benefit they could by it) yet being willing that nothing should be wanting on our part, I have propos'd to go over it again in this more public manner; as well to recall to *their* memories, and impress more deeply, what instructions were then given them, as to remind us *all* of the Vows and Promises we have made:

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at our Confirmation, and of the Obligations which Christianity lays upon us all.

I hope therefore, that all those who intend to be confirmed on *Monday* day next, have taken care to be present (indeed I see that many of them are so) and that they will particularly attend to these last directions I have to give them concerning those solemn Professions they are going to make.

In the first place then, I would have you all to observe, that no stress is to be laid on CONFIRMATION, as any ordinance of Christ; but merely as a decent and useful ceremony, where properly performed and carefully attended to. As a *Ceremony*, that *in itself* confers nothing on the persons confirmed, unless they take care to render it serviceable to them afterwards; but, where they do take such care, as what may prove of the greatest importance to their welfare: which a little attention to what shall be said, I hope, will shew you.

As to the *Institution* of this ceremony; some have derived it from the days of the

the Apostles; when, after persons had been baptized by the Deacons, the Apostles themselves seem to have laid their hands on the new converts at a convenient opportunity afterwards; whereby they received the miraculous influence of the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit of God. That this was *sometimes* the case is pretty certain; but we cannot affirm it to have been a *general* practice even in those days. And, since the Apostles are long since dead, and the miraculous powers conferred on them in the infancy of Christianity have ceased for several ages; there could be no plea for our continuing the Form *on that account*, unless they had ordered that it should be continued by their successors, or it could be proved that something could be conferred by it. This authority for it we cannot claim: and therefore, whatever may be pretended in the church of Rome, or however some of our own church may have thought to defend it from the practice of the Apostles; yet we must confess, that, were there no better reason to justify the use of confirmation at present, we would not stand forth its advocates.

But

But since it has been thought proper from very early days to initiate Children into the flock of Christ, and admit them into the covenant of the gospel by Baptism; at a time indeed when they certainly cannot understand the conditions and obligations of it; yet in order to induce their parents to instruct them in it, and in order to induce them afterwards to consider the evidences of Christianity and undertake the profession of it; so has it almost from time immemorial also been thought proper, that such persons as have been so admitted in their infancy, should take upon themselves publicly the Profession of Christianity as soon as they come to years of understanding: and *as such*, this may be a very *useful* ceremony; and may therefore strongly be recommended to your observance.

In the days of Christ indeed and those of his Apostles, when Christianity was scarcely instituted, and all persons had been educated either Jews or Heathens, none were admitted to the *Covenant of the Gospel* but such as embraced it from *conviction*; a conviction that Jesus of Nazareth

Nazareth was really the Christ that had been foretold by the prophets; who by his obedience was to restore all mankind to that immortality which the disobedience of their first parent had forfeited; and who instituted a new Religion in the world, which would be the best means of leading mankind to such behaviour here, as might be productive of happiness to them in that immortal state. On such conviction, and faith in Christ, and voluntary embracing of this new religion, they were admitted by Baptism into the conditions of it. And as one Condition on their part, was, repentance of their sins past; so another answering to it on the part of God was, that those sins past should be forgiven them; and therefore at their baptism they should become, or be considered thenceforward, as regenerated or new born babes; being baptized for the remission of their sins, and undertaking to perform a proper obedience for the time to come.

Now such Conviction it is impossible that children should have; but from actual sins likewise they are free: and hence,

hence, as they need no repentance, so neither is there any opportunity for remission. *Regeneration* therefore, or a *new birth*, can hardly be ascribed to them any otherwise than *figuratively*. They are just born, and certainly innocent, and can have no sins to remit; and therefore when our church talks of their being "regenerated by baptism," it can only mean that they are admitted thereby into that Covenant or Agreement, which when persons enter into it at an advanced time of life, and upon a late conviction, is a seal of their pardon and a kind of new birth unto them; and so to children may figuratively be called a new birth unto Christ, "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness," they being admitted by Baptism into all the other terms and conditions of the Gospel, though to them a previous repentance be impossible and unnecessary.

What those *Terms* are, has often been explained to you, not only in occasional Discourses, but in that more regular method in the evening service, when we have endeavoured to lay before you the
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several parts of our Church Catechism. However, since those are the terms or conditions, which when children are grown up to years of understanding, they promise to take upon themselves and to ratify at their Confirmation, it will be necessary to repeat the principal articles of the agreement again now; that they may the more fully comprehend the nature of the office, and what is expected of those who are going to renew their professions of obedience.

In the *Form* appointed for *Confirmation* (which is in all your Prayer-books, and which you know you were desired to read over frequently), you see in the first place there is a *Preface* directed to be read; in which it is said, that ‘ to the
‘ end that Confirmation may be mini-
‘ stred to the more edifying of such as
‘ shall receive it, the Church has thought
‘ good to order that none’ ‘ be Confirm-
‘ ed but such as’ ‘ can answer the ques-
‘ tions contained in the Catechism; to
‘ the end that, being come to years
‘ of discretion, and having learned’
what was promised at their Baptism,
‘ they may themselves with their own
‘ consent

‘ consent openly before the Church con-
firm the same; and promise’ in their
own persons, ‘ that they will evermore
endeavour faithfully to observe it.’

This therefore, you may perceive, re-
quires of us to know, *what* things were
promised, and in some sort *why* they
were promised, before we can answer
truly the question that is immediately
after this preface put to us by the Bi-
shop; whether we are willing to renew
this promise for ourselves?

The *promises* in *Baptism*, I have often
told you, in whatever antient form of
words they may still be conceived, can-
not in reason and good sense be supposed
to be a promise of what the baptized
person shall do some years after; which
is a promise in no one’s power to make
for another; but a promise that the God-
fathers and Godmothers will teach the
Child, or as far as they have opportu-
nity will see ‘ that the Child be taught,’
as it is expressed in our office of bap-
tism, what are the Obligations of Chris-
tianity: and they are made to answer at
that time certain questions concerning
them;

them; both to remind themselves of those obligations, and to remind all the rest of the congregation present, of what was undertaken for them, and what as Christians we all are indispensably obliged to perform. The *Effects* of Christ's coming into the world, and his obedience unto death, and his redeeming the whole human race, and his obtaining pardon for all, and his being the Judge of all at the last day, I hope you understand (yet it can never be too often repeated or too fully inculcated; *these Effects*) are *general*, and relate to all mankind both before and since his appearance, and ought not to be considered as belonging solely to the baptized. This Redemption is common to us with the whole human race: and as from Adam we all inherit mortality, and in consequence of his Transgression are all subject to death; so from Christ we all inherit immortality, and in consequence of his Obedience shall be raised again all of us in due time to a future life.

The *Happiness* likewise or unhappiness of each person in that future state, depends not solely, nor in any sort directly

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on their Baptism; but on their good behaviour, according to the best of their knowledge, and those measures of light and strength they have enjoyed here. The wild uncultivated Indian, who never heard of Christ, nor ever perhaps had any particular declaration of God's will made to him, other than what the law of every man's conscience has taught him; if he has lived up to the dictates of that conscience, may hope to be happy after his death: and while he inherits his mortal nature from Adam and his immortality from Christ, though he never heard of either, will be judged at the last day by Christ; and will be judged in righteousness, according to the opportunity he has had of knowing God's will and the obedience he has paid to it. The same may be said of the Jew or even the Mahometan or the Idolater; if he has been in such a situation as never to have been shewn his error, never to have heard of Christ, or not to have had his Offer fairly proposed to him, it can never be expected of him that he should renounce his errors or embrace the Religion of Christ. Yet will this be no excuse to either for rejecting it, or pretending

pretending to reject it, when it is fairly offered: and still less so, for living in any religion contrary to the dictates of natural reason and morality written on men's hearts, which is an obligation upon all. Each man, in every nation under heaven, and every persuasion however erroneous it may be, as certainly as he dies will be raised up to a future and eternal life; and be judged at the last day, and be sentenced to happiness or unhappiness in that life, according to his works here.

But besides these *general Effects* of Christ's death, and the power thereby committed to Him of raising all men and judging all men, He came to instruct mankind more fully in the will and design of God, in order to lead them to a better obedience and more certain way to happiness. He not only has obtained eternal life *for all*, but has "brought that life and immortality to light;" giving *us* an assurance of it, and making the happiness in that life the guide to our conduct and great object of our hope. This indeed can relate only to those to whom it is proposed: and with
it

it is proposed an offer of Pardon for sins past, on a hearty repentance, and of Assistance to enable us to amend for the time to come. This is the *New Covenant* established by Christ Jesus: that whereas "God at sundry times and in "diverse manners," had before "in "times past" revealed his will to man; and under Abraham, and afterwards under Moses, had established a Covenant or agreement with one family, to keep up a fuller knowledge of him till the times of the Messias; declaring that if they would obey his laws, they should "be his people and He would be their "God; so "in these latter days he has spoken to us by his Son," and offered through him, to enter into covenant, not with one family alone but with all mankind: a Covenant (that is to say an Agreement) whereby it is proposed to all men; that if they will attend to the terms of it, and with true faith acknowledge Jesus to be the Christ, the Messias, the Son of God, the great Prophet or Teacher that was to come into the world; and in consequence of that *belief*, will obey those Laws and rules for their behaviour which God gave to mankind by him;

him; they shall inherit the Promises that were given by him likewise. And, as a full assurance and expectation of such promises (the promises of pardon for sin, and eternal life and eternal happiness in the heavens, to all those who behave well here) must necessarily be the greatest of incitements to obedience; so the assurance that such happiness is in our own choice and our own power to obtain, must be the best means of inducing us to strive for it.

Thus is the *Covenant of the Gospel*, truly a covenant of *Grace*, that is of *Favour*; offered to mankind in order to lead them to obedience here, in the way to eternal happiness hereafter (and for aught we know to a greater degree of happiness than we could obtain without it): a Covenant, offered freely to all; but which no one is compelled to accept: a Covenant, proposed on such easy and advantageous terms, that no man who reflects seriously upon them can well reject it; but which yet he is at liberty to reject if he please. His future *Being* after death, and even his *immortality*, do not indeed, it should seem, depend at

all upon his acceptance of this offer: neither does his *happiness* in that future and immortal state depend absolutely, though perhaps in a great degree, upon it. For, setting aside its being an Offer from God, which ought not lightly to be rejected; if we consider it only on the foot of human reason; since a man's eternal happiness does depend upon his good behaviour here; and since the gracious terms of the gospel covenant are the best means of leading him to that good behaviour (so that were they difficult, he ought still gladly to have embraced them); if he rejects those terms, he rejects them to his loss. Should they be proposed to him in such a manner, or were his capacity and abilities such, as that he could not comprehend them; God it is certain will judge him in righteousness and equity, and make all necessary allowances accordingly. But if a man rejects them through indolence, or an unwillingness to listen to them; or because they are a restraint upon his unruly passions, which it was their intent and design to restrain; and still more so, if he treats those Terms with scorn and studied contempt, as is the way

way of some who are rather pretended than real unbelievers; he rejects them not only to his loss but to his sorrow, and unless he amends his ways to his eternal sorrow too.

These are the *Terms* which we were admitted by *Baptism*; whereby, though as children we had no former sins to wash away, we were received into the *Covenant of the Gospel*; and some security was provided for our being instructed in that, which is a much surer way to happiness, than the being left only to the guidance of our natural reason, or the dictates of our consciences, or those laws which prudence or propriety might point out to a thinking man, but from which the violence of unruly passions are too apt generally to turn him aside. *What* it was promised at that time that we should be *taught*, is enumerated in our Catechism, as consisting principally of ' three things: First, that we should
' renounce the devil and all his works,
' the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the
' flesh; Secondly, that we should believe
' all the articles of the Christian faith;
' and

‘and Thirdly, that we should keep God’s
 ‘holy will and commandments, and walk
 ‘in the same all the days of our lives:’
 That is, in the first place, if we have
 been guilty of sin, that we should re-
 pent of it and forsake it; and at all
 times whether we have already been
 guilty or not, that we should determine
 to renounce, that is to avoid, every sin
 and every temptation to it; In the se-
 cond place, that we should believe and
 heartily embrace all the revelations God
 has made of his will to mankind, and
 particularly that last which was delivered
 by Jesus Christ, his Son; And in the
 third place, that we should resolve and
 promise to obey all his Commands; or
 all those Duties which either our own
 natural reason and conscience, or reve-
 lation and the scriptures tell us we ought
 to perform *.

These

* Among the things so solemnly promised,
 should be reckoned an attendance upon Public
 Worship, and that part of it in particular which
 is the peculiar Mark or Badge of Christianity;
 the receiving of the holy Communion as soon as
 may be after Confirmation, and regularly upon
 all occasions afterwards. Both of which Duties
 are sadly mistaken: it being very customary to
 suppose

These then, when we come to years of maturity, are what we are called upon to renew and take upon ourselves at our *Confirmation*. And this is the meaning of that question proposed by the Bishop; ‘Do you here in the presence of God and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your Baptism; ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and acknowledging yourselves bound to believe and to do all those things which your Godfathers and Godmothers then undertook for you?’ That is; Do you engage for yourselves to perform those Duties of Christianity, in the which it was promised you should be instructed, in the hope of inheriting its promises?

Hereby you perceive, that the Office we call CONFIRMATION must be merely

suppose children fit for Confirmation, who are reckoned unfit for the Communion; and very common to fancy Confirmation, which is but of human appointment, to be *necessary*; while the Communion, which was certainly appointed by Christ himself, is looked upon as *needless*.

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an office or ceremony of *human* appointment; and should be looked upon only *as such*; (since it is a consequence of Infant-baptism, which itself is of human appointment also); and that it is *never to be repeated* more than once. Were persons not baptized till they were advanced to *riper years*, there could be no pretence for this ceremony: their repentance for any sins past, and their embracing Christianity upon a *conviction* of its divine authority and intrinsic excellence, would entitle them to Baptism; and Baptism, as being the form of admission appointed by Christ himself, would entitle them to a remission of their former sins, and we think admit them fully into all the privileges of the Gospel. But since the instructing of *Children* from their earliest infancy in the rules and precepts of Christianity, must be the best means of leading *them* to embrace its Terms when they advance in life; and since the calling upon the Parents and some select Friends of the children, to promise that they shall be so instructed, is the best security we can have against its being neglected; Infants are admitted on such security into the Covenant

venant of the Gospel by Baptism; and are required and expected as soon as they arrive at years of maturity, once for all to take upon themselves the obligations of it.

And surely there is great wisdom, and propriety in this *Institution*, considered in *this light*. For at that time of life when they are called to Confirmation, they are usually just entering upon the most dangerous of seasons: going soon to launch out from under their parents' and instructors' eye, into a wide ocean full of rocks and shoals, a wide world over-run with wickedness; beset on all sides with temptations to sin, their own passions kindling daily and inciting them from within, evil companions from without, and the unsuspicious giddiness of youth exposing them to all its allurements;---at such a time as this, to be called upon to consider the importance and obligations of Christianity; to be made to apply to their spiritual Directors for Advice and Instruction, when advice and instruction might be most useful; while yet innocent, to be induced to think on their religious Duties, and to resolve upon the Course they shall
run

take, when some course will be to be run and must be resolved upon; and then in a serious solemn assembly, in the house of God, at his holy table, before one of the highest orders of ministers in his Church, to declare those Resolutions, and renew in their own persons those Vows of obedience to the will of God, the keeping of which is so essential to their future happiness, and which was therefore in their Baptism promised to be taught them; ratifying and confirming the same, 'and acknowledging themselves' by the 'laws of Christianity bound to believe and 'to do all those things which were then 'undertaken for them,' in the hope and assurance that if they do so they shall be partakers of all the Promises of the Gospel; the pardon of their sins on a hearty repentance and amendment of life, the favour and assistance of God at all times, and the certainty of a blessed immortality in the heavens;---to be called upon to undertake these things and make these professions in so solemn a manner, for so good an end;---nothing surely can be better contrived to impress on their minds the Importance of Obedience, and stir them up to hearty Resolutions of performing it. If they
answer

answer the Question proposed to them, inconsiderately or without any purpose of keeping to what they profess, it is a solemn mockery of God, and a trifling with Him who must not be trifled with: while the answering fairly and truly and from the bottom of their hearts, that they do resolve and are determined to exert their best endeavours to keep it; we may trust that such a resolution so taken, will be best likely to be remembered, and will obtain the blessing of God upon those who thus take it.

Yet that nothing may be wanting to render it most beneficial to them; after this Declaration of theirs, the Prayers of the congregation are added, to beg this blessing of God upon them. First in a *general* address to the Almighty, offered in the name of the whole congregation, to desire that He would 'strengthen them' in it: Next in a *particular* one, said by the Bishop over the head of each, then kneeling in order before the Lord's table, that God would 'defend them with his
' heavenly favour that they may con-
' tinue his servants for ever, and daily
' encrease in his Holy Spirit more and
C ' more

‘more until they come to his everlasting kingdom;’ the Bishop laying his hand severally on the head of each, as he pronounces these words, to beg a particular blessing may be poured down upon each; and that each at the time may beg such a blessing for himself; and may silently and in his own heart confirm and renew between himself and his God, those Vows of Obedience which he has just made public. After this, the Bishop and Congregation join together in the Lord’s prayer; and next in another prayer for the newly-confirmed; that God, who alone can enable us ‘both to will and to do,’ would ‘let his fatherly hand ever be over them,’ and would ‘lead them’ and keep them ‘in the knowledge and obedience to his’ commands, ‘that in the end they may obtain everlasting life;’ by which in these words certainly is meant everlasting happiness hereafter. Then, after one of the usual collects in the communion service, that set is dismissed with a solemn blessing.

This is the *Office of CONFIRMATION*, which as was said at first, you now see
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is a decent and useful ceremony where properly performed and carefully attended to : but is *no ordinance of Christ*, nor confers *any thing at all* on the persons confirmed; unless they render it serviceable to them, by considering the Vows they make in it, and remembering those Vows ever afterwards. As to the Bishop's *laying his hand* on their heads; it would be superstition indeed to suppose *that* could be of any efficacy *in itself* : it being only a ceremony used in antient times in spiritual matters, and continued in later ones, expressing good will and good wishes from a superior to an inferior; as giving “ the right hand of fellowship ” does among equals, or as bowing the head or kissing the hand does from the inferior to the superior in civil intercourse. Neither of these usages ought to be thought to confer any virtue, nor to imply any improper adulation, though some of them be received on the knee; but to be mere *human Ceremonies*, as marks of respect on the one hand or of kindness on the other; and in all, as tokens of mutual regard and affection, added only to the words sometimes pronounced on the occasion, to testify more

emphatically their meaning. As such, is this laying on of the hand at Confirmation: which, however it may have been held in superstitious veneration, is really but a *Ceremony*; and confers no more, than the *Blessing* pronounced by the Bishop at the close of that service, or by us at the end of our daily ministration among you: they being all of them, only *Prayers* to God, that He would bless you and keep you in the knowledge of him and an obedience to his commands, and in the end would reward you in his everlasting kingdom. This, if you endeavour to love and to serve him, you may assure yourselves he will do; and will not do the less for your shewing an inclination to comply with a reasonable service, or for the prayers and good wishes of his Ministers for you: But if by wilful sin or gross negligence 'you drive away this ' blessing of God from you, it must not be expected,' as says a late Prelate on this occasion, 'that your Baptism or ' your Confirmation or the prayers of ' the Bishop, or of the Church or of the ' whole world should do you any service.'

Thus

Thus have we now gone through this Office of CONFIRMATION, and endeavoured to recall to the memory of those young persons who are going to be confirmed, what was delivered to each of them before in private: and, though it has necessarily detained us somewhat longer than is usual, I must yet add a few words more of *Request* to each;---That they will take care to have their prayer books with them, and to be attentive to the whole service; not to press forward so as to disturb those who are called up, or who go up to the table before them, but to wait in silence till their turn comes, and then to go up in such an orderly manner as shall witness that they are sensible of what they are about. And I 'charge you all' (according to the orders received from the Bishop) 'that you behave with decency
' during the whole time that you are in
' the church, and make all the proper
' answers in the form of confirmation,
' and do not depart from the space before the rails of the communion table
' till that set or number with whom you
' are confirmed shall be dismissed with
' the blessing.' This indeed, if you consider what you are doing, and are
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of understanding fit to be confirmed, you will of yourselves take care of. I think you understand it, and therefore have answered for you. Let us hope that you will do it in good earnest; and let us henceforward see that you keep the promises you make.

You are of age to know what is right and what is wrong. You now are innocent: you know best; but I hope at your early time of life I may say you are innocent of wilful sin. For the Lord's sake keep that innocence undefiled. And be assured, that if you do so, God will be always with you, to protect you from all harm and to direct your otherwise wandering steps; that to him you may always have recourse as a bosom friend and "cast all your care upon him," as well knowing that "he careth for you:" that if you neglect him, he will spie out all your ways and all your inmost thoughts, and will recompense you according to your deserving: but if you serve Him with all your heart, in honesty and godly sincerity, and are regular in attendance on his Worship and his Ordinances he will never forsake you at
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any time, and "all things shall work together for your good." Believe me, the Assurance of having this protection is in your own power, and will be your best comfort all your days: your safest and most sure guide in prosperity: your only support in adversity, when sickness or distress of any kind or old age or death approach; and will lead you most happily through the waves of this troublesome and uncertain world, to that certain and everlasting bliss, which is prepared for all those in every station who love and serve God. Which that you may always bear in mind, as the surest means of conducting you thither, may GOD of his mercy grant through JESUS CHRIST our Saviour; whose obedience unto death has obtained ETERNAL LIFE *for all men*; and the precepts of whose most holy religion thus delivered *to us* by Him from heaven were given to prepare us for and conduct us to ETERNAL BLISS.

F I N I S.

On Conversion

any time, and "all things shall work
together for your good." Believe me,
the assurance of having this protection
is in your own power, and will be your
best comfort all your days: your intellect
and most fine grade in spirituality: your
only support in adversity, when sickness
or distress of any kind or old age or
other approach; and will lead you most
triumphantly through the waves of this
troublesome and uncertain world, to that
certain and everlasting bliss, which is
prepared for all those in every nation
who love and serve God. Which that
you may always bear in mind, as the
first means of comforting you through
my God, and his mercy grant through
Jesus Christ our Saviour, whose obedi-
ence unto death has obtained for us
eternal life, and the promise of
which most holy religion has been
to every Christian heaven were given to
prepare us for and conduct us to eter-
nal bliss.



W. I. N. S.